

## Introduction and Context

Though activists, scholars and advocates have called for reparations for the enslavement of people with African ancestry since Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation officially abolishing slavery in the United States in 1863, a pivotal point in the contemporary discourse surrounding reparations came in 2014, when Ta-Nehisi Coates presented “The Case for Reparations” in *The Atlantic*. In the seminal essay, Coates expands on the common understanding of the purpose of reparations to encompass not only the atrocities committed by this country during the era of chattel slavery, but also masterfully called out the role of government in creating and perpetuating poverty by codifying racist practices in housing policy, particularly during the postwar era of urban history in the 1950s through 1970s now known as *urban renewal*. Coates illustrates Black displacement and *white flight* using Chicago as an example, but is very clear that the effects reach far beyond the limits of the city in the prairie: “Chicago, like the country at large, embraced policies that placed black America’s most energetic, ambitious, and thrifty countrymen beyond the pale of society and marked them as rightful targets for legal theft. The effects reverberate beyond the families who were robbed to the community that beholds the spectacle.”

This report contributes to the contemporary discourse about reparations—specifically expanding on the understanding of the role that city governments have played in perpetuating harms that further marginalize their African American communities. The San Francisco African American Reparations Advisory Committee (SFAARAC) names *Urban Renewal* and its effects as its primary harm, and the Committee identifies the ways that these harms were perpetuated through policy decisions and institutional choices through the decades.

## Urban Renewal as a Catalyst for Black Displacement

Beginning in the mid-1940s and lasting until the 1970s, the period of urban history known as Urban Renewal marked a period of large scale, federally-funded development initiatives that would go on to have long lasting socioeconomic and spatial effects on cities that continue to this day. When the industrial boom that drove Black migration subsided in 1945 when World War II ended, the shipyards closed and Black San Franciscans faced employment discrimination and rising unemployment rates. They were also denied housing throughout much of the city, so most of the Black population came to be heavily concentrated in the Western Addition and Bayview-Hunters Point. It was during that time that the Fillmore was known as the “Harlem of the West”—a vibrant corridor that became a gateway for Black jazz musicians thanks to the concentration of Black-owned and Black-serving venues and hotels. The Fillmore Corridor was a vibrant destination for the city’s Black population, with restaurants, theaters, storefronts and other businesses that catered to a Black clientele.

## AARAC Executive Summary [DRAFT]

Like many cities across the United States, throughout the 1950s San Francisco began to use federal funding available from the newly-formed Housing and Home Finance Agency (the Department of Housing and Urban Development's predecessor) to engage in "slum clearance." Local agencies used redevelopment as a catalyst to push out entire communities, designating certain blocks to be "blighted," and thus ripe for City intervention.

Under controversial Director M. Justin Herman, who headed the agency from 1959 until his death in 1971, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency ultimately displaced over 20,000 primarily Black residents in 60 city blocks of the Fillmore District and Western Addition. Displaced households were issued Certificates of Preference guaranteeing them preference in affordable housing lotteries; however, the program can be difficult to navigate and there is little known about the households who historically received those certificates.

In the ensuing decades, the area has become some of the most valuable real estate in San Francisco, and former residents have been not only priced out in many cases, but also robbed of the opportunity to build a legacy generational wealth through property ownership. Urban Renewal is perhaps the most significant example of how the City and County of San Francisco as an institution played a role in undermining Black wealth and actively displacing the city's Black population.

### **A Legacy of Civic Disinvestment**

Over the duration of the SFAARAC's meetings since June 2021, the Committee has ultimately found that the effects of these institutional and policy decisions have been generational and overlapping. During preliminary research, the Committee studied several reports centered on San Francisco's Black communities commissioned by the City and County of San Francisco ranging from the 1960s to as recently as 2020 that reveal a pattern of disparities that reverberate through the decades: The Black community consistently has limited access to housing options in the city, has faced a steady decline in population, and, even as the city's overall wealth has grown with the fortunes of the technology industry, the Black community has fallen behind in household income and wealth-building opportunities. Though policy recommendations have been made throughout the years, it was not until the development and implementation of the Dream Keeper Initiative in 2020 that the city specifically committed resources to San Francisco's diverse Black communities. The Dream Keeper Initiative has been a successful start to investing in Black-led and Black-serving institutions, and is a promising catalyst for pursuing new possibilities, but there is still work to be done in order for Black San Franciscans to fully achieve redress for the legacy of civic disinvestment that has persisted across several generations.

## A Tool for Collective Action

The hope for this document is to be more than just a report; the SFAARAC wants this to be a living document that serves as a tool for community action. The Committee is charged with developing recommendations, and ultimately getting these recommendations passed by the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor will take collective action and leveraging of institutional power.

## Methodology

Early in the SFAARAC's formation, the Committee decided to concentrate on four distinct areas: ***Economic Empowerment, Education, Health and Policy***. Subcommittees met at least monthly, and invited interested members of the public to join to offer their insights at these meetings. Ultimately, each Subcommittee conducted research and held meetings with experts to refine their recommendations. Committee members also got valuable insight from public comment during monthly full body meetings and from Listening Sessions, held during Summer 2022. Subcommittee Leads presented Draft Recommendations in early November 2022 and incorporated public feedback during the Special Meeting held on November 7, 2022 to reflect the community's desires.

## Recommendations

[TK]